



File Code: 1950
Date: December 5, 2017

Dear Neighbors and Interested Parties:

As the Responsible Official for this project, I am writing to inform you of the release of the Draft Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Forest Health Initiative Project.

This Draft Decision Notice documents my rationale for selecting the management activities prescribed for the project area, as analyzed in Alternative 2 of the Forest Health Initiative Environmental Assessment (EA). This informational letter is being sent to those who provided comments during the scoping; and/or 30-day comment periods held for the Forest Health Initiative project; or, assisted in the development of the project during one of our Collaborative meetings. Comments received during our public involvement phases have been reviewed by me, as the Responsible Official, and the Interdisciplinary Team. Comments were considered in making this Draft Decision. Documentation of this review is located in the project file and available upon request.

The Forest Health Initiative project is situated solely on Federal lands throughout southern Missouri on several MTNF Ranger Districts, including: Salem, Potosi/Fredericktown, Ava/Cassville/Willow Springs, Eleven Point and Poplar Bluff; within the Missouri Counties of: Dent, Reynolds, Iron, Washington, Howell, Douglas, Shannon, Oregon, Carter, Ripley, Butler, and Wayne.

The analysis area totals approximately 943,982 acres, of which 566,071 acres are National Forest System (NFS) lands. Of these lands, approximately 45,885 acres are proposed for treatment. The legal description of the project area is:

Salem & Potosi/Fredericktown Ranger Districts: T33N, R3W; T33N, R2W;
T34N, R2W; T32N, R3W;

Ava/Cassville/Willow Springs Ranger District: T27N, R10W; T26N, R10W;
T26N, R11W; T25N, R11W;

Eleven Point Ranger District: T23N, Ranges 2W, 1W, 1E, 2E; T24N, Ranges
3W, 2W, 1W, 1E, 2E; T25N, Ranges 5W, 4W, 3W, 2W, 1W, 1E; T26N, Ranges
5W, 4W, 3W, 1W; T27N, Ranges 4W, 3W;

Poplar Bluff Ranger District: T25N, Ranges 6E; 7E; T26N, Ranges 7E, 6E, 4E;
T27N, Ranges 3E, 4E, 6E; T28N, Ranges 4E and 5E; Fifth Principal Meridian.

The analysis suggested that Alternative 2 would provide the best mixture of activities for addressing the key issues identified during the scoping and analysis phases of this project while responding to concerns of the public noted during the public involvement processes.



Activities associated with this alternative would be implemented on approximately 45,885 acres of the Forest Health Initiative project area.

Alternative 2 offers opportunities to improve overall forest health, enhance natural communities, and maintain the structure, composition, and function of distinctive terrestrial and aquatic natural communities. Alternative 2 would protect critical resources such as cultural resources, springs, caves, and sensitive habitats; provide a wide diversity of habitats to meet the needs of plants, fish and wildlife species; provide a variety of timber products, including firewood; and, enhance the project area's dispersed recreation experience.

Alternative 2 would also protect and improve Federally listed species habitat conditions for the Northern long-eared bat, Gray bat, and Indiana bat. These management activities are designed to move portions of the project area toward the desired condition (similar to historical vegetative patterns) outlined in the 2005 Mark Twain National Forest Plan. The Forest Health Initiative Environmental Assessment documents the effects of these activities.

This proposed project is subject to a pre-decisional objection process, pursuant to 36 CFR part 218, subparts A and B. The regulations are available at:
<https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2013/03/27/2013-06857/project-level-predecisional-administrative-review-process>.

Objections will only be accepted from individuals or entities who previously submitted timely and specific written comments, as defined by 36 CFR 218.2, about this proposed project during any designated opportunity for public comment in accordance with 36 CFR 218.5(a). Issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted timely, specific written comments regarding the proposed project unless based on new information arising after designated comment opportunities.

Pursuant to 36 CFR 218.8 (d), the objection must include:

- a description of those aspects of the proposed project addressed by the objection, including specific issues related to the proposed project; if applicable,
- how the objector believes the environmental analysis or draft decision specifically violates law, regulation or policy;
- suggested remedies that would resolve the objection;
- supporting reasons for the reviewing officer to consider; and
- a statement that demonstrates the connection between prior specific written comments on the particular proposed project or activity; and, the content of the objection, unless the objection concerns an issue that arose after the designated opportunities for comment.

In addition, an objection must include the following:

- 1) Objector's name address and telephone number (if available);
- 2) Signature or other verification of authorship of the individual, entity, or lead objector;
- 3) Name of the project;

- 4) Name and title of the Responsible Official;
- 5) Name of the National Forest, and
- 6) Name of the Ranger District where the project will be implemented.

The objection's Reviewing Officer is Regional Forester Kathleen Atkinson (36 CFR 218.7(c)(2)(i)).

Furthermore, incorporation of documents by reference is not allowed, except for the following:

- all or any part of a Federal law or regulation,
- Forest Service directives and land management plans,
- documents referenced by the Forest Service in the proposed project EA, or
- comments previously provided to the Forest Service by the objector during public involvement opportunities for the proposed project where written comments were requested by the Responsible Official (36 CFR 218.8 (b)).

All other supporting documents must be provided with the objection.

Objections for this project, including any enclosures, or supporting documentation, will be accepted for 45 days beginning on the first day after the date of publication of the legal notice in the paper of record (Rolla, Missouri's *Rolla Daily News*). The date of publication of the legal notice is the only means of calculating the length of the objection period. Those wishing to object should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. If the objection period ends on a Saturday, Sunday or Federal holiday, objections will be accepted until the end of the next Federal working day.

Objections may be submitted by mail to:

Objection Reviewing Officer, Region 9
Administrative Review Staff
USDA Forest Service
626 East Wisconsin Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Objections may be submitted by electronic mail to: objections-eastern-region@fs.fed.us. Acceptable formats for emailed objections include: plain text (.txt), rich text (.rtf), portable document format (.pdf), Word (.doc or .docx) or any other format supported by Microsoft Office applications. On the subject line, please type: Mark Twain Forest Health Initiative Project.

Objections may be sent by fax to (414) 944-3963, Attn: **Administrative Review Staff**, Region 9, USDA Forest Service, Eastern Regional Office; on the subject line, please type: Mark Twain Forest Health Initiative Project.

Normal business hours, for those submitting hand delivered objections to the address above are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday – Friday Central Time (except Federal holidays). It is the responsibility of objectors to ensure their objection is received in a timely manner (36 CFR 218.26(a)).

Objections must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. Central Time on the closing date of the objection period. Timeliness will be determined by the following indicators:

- the date of the U.S. Postal Service postmark for an objection received before the close of the fifth business day after the objection filing period;
- the agency's electronically generated posted date and time for email and facsimiles;
- the shipping date for delivery by private carrier for an objection received before the close of the fifth business day after the objection filing period;
- the official agency date stamp showing receipt of hand delivery.

For emailed objections, the objector should receive an automated electronic acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation of receipt of the objection, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely filing by other means (36 CFR 218.9).

If no objections are filed within the 45-day time period for this Draft Decision, then a Final Decision may occur on, but not before, the 5th business day following the end of the objection filing period. If an objection is filed, a Final Decision will not be signed until all concerns and instructions (identified by the Reviewing Officer) have been addressed (36 CFR 218.12 [b]).

If you have any questions related to the Forest Health Initiative project, the USDA Objection process, or would like a printed copy of the Draft Decision Notice or Forest Health Initiative Environmental Assessment, contact Mark Hamel at: Mark Twain National Forest, 401 Fairgrounds Road, Rolla, Missouri 65401; or, telephone him at (573) 341-7443.

A copy of both documents may also be obtained on the Forest's website at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/mtnf/projects>. Once the link is open, scroll down to the Forest Health Initiative Project.

We appreciate your interest in the management of the Mark Twain National Forest.

Sincerely,



SHERRI K. SCHWENKE
Forest Supervisor

cc: Mark Hamel